The Choice of Books

John Lubbock

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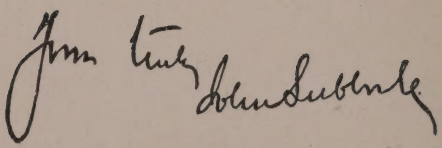

THE CHOICE OF BOOKS

BY

SIR JOHN LUBBOCK, 1st. baron Avebury

Philadelphia

HENRY ALTEMUS

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THE CHOICE OF BOOKS.

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THE CHOICE OF BOOKS.

"All round the room my silent servants wait
My friends in every season, bright and dim,
Angels and Seraphim
Come down and murmur to me, sweet and low,
And spirits of the skies all come and go
Early and Late." PROCTOR.

AND yet too often they wait in vain. One reason for this is, I think, that people are overwhelmed by the crowd of books offered to them.

In old days books were rare and dear. Now on the contrary, it may be said with greater truth than ever that

"Words are things, and a small drop of ink,
Falling like dew upon a thought, produces
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions,
think."

Our ancestors had a difficulty in procuring them. Our difficulty now is what to select. We must be careful what we read, and not, like the sailors of

Ulysses, take bags of wind for sacks of treasure—not only lest we should even now fall into the error of the Greeks, and suppose that language and definitions can be instruments of investigation as well as of thought, but lest, as too often happens, we should waste time over trash. There are many books to which one may apply, in the sarcastic sense, the ambiguous remark said to have been made to an unfortunate author, "I will lose no time in reading your book."

There are, indeed, books and books, and there are books which, as Lamb said, are not books at all. It is wonderful how much innocent happiness we thoughtlessly throw away. An Eastern proverb says that calamities sent by heaven may be avoided, but from those we bring on ourselves there is no escape.

Many, I believe, are deterred from attempting what are called stiff books for fear they should not understand them; but there are few who need complain of the narrowness of their minds, if only they would do their best with them.

In reading, however, it is most important to select subjects in which one is interested. I remember years ago consulting Mr. Darwin as to the selection of a course of study. He asked me what interested me most, and advised me to choose that subject. This, indeed, applies to the work of life generally.

I am sometimes disposed to think that the readers of the next generation will be, not our lawyers

and doctors, shopkeepers and manufacturers, but the laborers and mechanics. Does not this seem natural? The former work mainly with their head; when their daily duties are over the brain is often exhausted, and of their leisure time much must be devoted to air and exercise. The laborer and mechanic, on the contrary, besides working often for much shorter hours, have in their work-time taken sufficient bodily exercise, and could therefore give any leisure they might have to reading and study. They have not done so as yet, it is true; but this has been for obvious reasons. Now, however, in the first place, they receive an excellent education in elementary schools, and in the second have more easy access to the best books.

Ruskin has observed that he does not wonder at what men suffer, but he often wonders at what they lose. We suffer much, no doubt, from the faults of others, but we lose much more by our own ignorance.

"If," says Sir John Herschel, "I were to pray for a taste which should stand me in stead under every variety of circumstances, and be a source of happiness and cheerfulness to me through life, and a shield against its ills, however things might go amiss and the world frown upon me, it would be a taste for reading. I speak of it of course only as a worldly advantage, and not in the slightest degree as superseding or derogating from the higher office and surer and stronger panoply of religious principles—but as a taste, and instrument, and a mode

of pleasurable gratification. Give a man this taste, and the means of gratifying it, and you can hardly fail of making a happy man, unless, indeed, you put into his hands a most perverse selection of books."

It is one thing to own a library; it is quite another to use it wisely. I have often been astonished how little care people devote to the selection of what they read. Books, we know, are almost innumerable; our hours for reading are, alas! very few. And yet many people read almost by hazard. They will take any book they chance to find in a room at a friend's house; they will buy a novel at a railway-stall if it has an attractive title; indeed, I believe in some cases even the binding affects their choice. The selection is, no doubt, far from easy. I have often wished some one would recommend a list of a hundred good books. If we had such lists drawn up by a few good guides they would be most useful. I have indeed sometimes heard it said that in reading every one must choose for himself, but this reminds me of the recommendation not to go into the water till you can swim.

In the absence of such lists I have picked out the books most frequently mentioned with approval by those who have referred directly or indirectly to the pleasure of reading, and have ventured to include some which, though less frequently mentioned, are especial favorites of my own. Every one who looks at the list will wish to suggest other books,

as indeed I should myself, but in that case the number would soon run up.

I have abstained, for obvious reasons, from mentioning works by living authors, though from many of them—Tennyson, Ruskin, and others—I have myself derived the keenest enjoyment; and I have omitted works on science, with one or two exceptions, because the subject is so progressive.

I feel that the attempt is over bold, and I must beg for indulgence, while hoping for criticism; indeed one object which I have had in view is to stimulate others more competent far than I am to give us the advantage of their opinions.

Moreover, I must repeat that I suggest these works rather as those which, as far as I have seen, have been most frequently recommended, than as suggestions of my own, though I have slipped in a few of my own special favorites.

In any such selection much weight should, I think, be attached to the general verdict of mankind. There is a "struggle for existence" and a "survival of the fittest" among books, as well as among animals and plants. As Alonzo of Aragon said, "Age is a recommendation in four things—old wood to burn, old wine to drink, old friends to trust, and old books to read." Still, this can-

Several longer lists have been given; for instance, by Comte, *Catechism of Positive Philosophy;* Pycroft, *Course of English Reading;* Baldwin, *The Book Lover;* Perkins, *The Best Reading;* and by Mr. Ireland, *Books for General Readers.*

not be accepted without important qualifications. The most recent books of history and science contain or ought to contain, the most accurate information and the most trustworthy conclusions. Moreover, while the books of other races and times have an interest from their very distance, it must be admitted that many will still more enjoy, and feel more at home with, those of our own century and people.

Yet the oldest books of the world are remarkable and interesting on account of their very age; and the works which have influenced the opinions, or charmed the leisure hours, of millions of men in distant times and far-away regions are well worth reading on that very account, even if to us they seem scarcely to deserve their reputation. It is true that to many, such works are accessible only in translations; but translations, though they can never perhaps do justice to the original, may yet be admirable in themselves. The Bible itself, which must stand first in the list, is a conclusive case.

At the head of all non-Christian moralists, I must place the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus, certainly one of the noblest books in the whole of literature; it has, moreover, been admirably translated. With Epictetus, I think must come Marcus Aurelius. The *Analects* of Confucius will, I believe, prove disappointing to most English readers, but the ef-

fect it has produced on the most numerous race of men constitutes in itself a peculiar interest. The *Ethics* of Aristotle, perhaps, appear to some disadvantage from the very fact that they have so profoundly influenced our views of morality. The *Koran*, like the *Analects* of Confucius, will to most of us derive its principal interest from the effect it has exercised, and still exercises, on so many millions of our fellow-men. I doubt whether in any other respect it will seem to repay perusal, and to most persons probably certain extracts, not too numerous, would appear sufficient.

The writings of the Apostolic Fathers have been collected in one volume by Wake. It is but a small one, and though I must humbly confess that I was disappointed, they are perhaps all the more curious from the contrast they afford to those of the Apostles themselves. Of the later Fathers I have included only the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, which Dr. Pusey selected for the commencement of the *Library of the Fathers*, and which, as he observes, has "been translated again and again into almost every European language, and in all loved;" though Luther was of opinion that St. Augustine "wrote nothing to the purpose concerning faith." But then Luther was no great admirer of the Father. St. Jerome, he says, "writes, alas! very coldly;" Chrysostom "digresses from the chief points;" St. Jerome is "very poor;" and in fact, he says, "the more I read the books of the Fathers the more I find myself offended;" while

Renan, in his interesting autobiography, compared theology to a Gothic Cathedral, "elle a la grandeur, les vides immenses, et le peu de solidité."

Among other devotional works most frequently recommended are Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, Pascal's *Pensées*, Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and last, not least, Keble's beautiful *Christian Year*.

Aristotle and Plato again stand at the head of another class. The *Politics* of Aristotle, and Plato's *Dialogues*, if not the whole, at any rate the *Phædo*, the *Apology*, and the *Republic*, will be of course read by all who wish to know anything of the history of human thought, though I am heretical enough to doubt whether the latter repays the minute and laborious study often devoted to it.

Aristotle being the father, if not the creator, of the modern scientific method, it has followed naturally—indeed, almost inevitably—that his principles have become part of our very intellectual being, so that they seem now almost self-evident, while his actual observations, though very remarkable—as, for instance, when he observes that bees on one journey confine themselves to one kind of flower—still have been in many cases superseded by others, carried on under more favorable conditions. We must not be ungrateful to the great master, because his lessons have taught us how to advance.

Plato, on the other hand, I say so with all respect, seems to me in some cases to play on words: his arguments are very able, very philosophical, often very noble; but not always conclusive; in a language differently constructed they might sometimes tell in exactly the opposite sense. If this method has proved less fruitful, if in metaphysics we have made but little advance, that very fact in one point of view leaves the *Dialogues* of Socrates as instructive now as ever they were; while the problems with which they deal will always rouse our interest, as the calm and lofty spirit which inspires them must command our admiration. Of the *Apology* and the *Phædo* especially it would be impossible to speak too gratefully.

I would also mention Demosthenes' *De Coronâ*, which Lord Brougham pronounced the greatest oration of the greatest of orators; Lucretius, Plutarch's Lives, Horace, and at least the *De Officiis*, *De Amicitiâ*, and *De Senectute* of Cicero.

The great epics of the world have always constituted one of the most popular branches of literature. Yet how few, comparatively, ever read Homer or Virgil after leaving school.

The *Nibelungenlied*, our great Anglo-Saxon epic, is perhaps too much neglected, no doubt on account of its painful character. Brunhild and Kriemhild, indeed, are far from perfect, but we meet with few such "live" women in Greek or Roman literature. Nor must I omit to mention Sir T. Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, though I confess

I do so mainly in deference to the judgment of others.

Among the Greek tragedians I include Æschylus, if not all his works, at any rate *Prometheus*, perhaps the sublimest poem in Greek literature, and the *Trilogy* (Mr. Symonds in his *Greek Poets* speaks of the "unrivalled majesty" of the *Agamemnon*, and Mark Pattison considered it "the grandest work of creative genius in the whole range of literature"); or, as Sir M. E. Grant Duff recommends, the *Persæ;* Sophocles (*Œdipus Tyrannus*), Euripides (*Medea*), and Aristophanes (*The Knights* and *Clouds*); unfortunately, as Schlegel says, probably even the greatest scholar does not understand half his jokes; and I think most modern readers will prefer our modern poets.

I should like, moreover, to say a word for Eastern poetry, such as portions of the *Maha Bharata* and *Ramayana* (too long probably to be read through, but of which Talboys Wheeler has given a most interesting epitome in the first two volumes of his *History of India*); the *Shah-nameh*, the work of the great Persian poet Firdusi; Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*, and the Sheking, the classical collection of ancient Chinese odes. Many I know, will think I ought to have included Omar Khayyam.

In history we are beginning to feel that the vices and vicissitudes of kings and queens, the dates of battles and wars, are far less important than the development of human thought, the progress of

art, of science, and of law, and the subject is on that very account even more interesting than ever. I will, however, only mention, and that rather from a literary than a historical point of view, Herodotus, Xenophon (the *Anabasis*), Thucydides, and Tacitus (*Germania*); and of modern historians, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* ("the splendid bridge from the old world to the new"), Hume's *History of England*, Carlyle's *French Revolution*, Grote's *History of Greece*, and Green's *Short History of the English People*.

Science is so rapidly progressive that, though to many minds it is the most fruitful and interesting subject of all, I cannot here rest on that agreement which, rather than my own opinion, I take as the basis of my list. I will therefore only mention Bacon's *Novum Organum*, Mill's *Logic*, and Darwin's *Origin of Species*; in Political Economy, which some of our rulers do not now sufficiently value, Mill, and parts of Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, for probably those who do not intend to make a special study of political economy would scarcely read the whole.

Among voyages and travels, perhaps those most frequently suggested are Cook's *Voyages*, Humboldt's *Travels*, and Darwin's *Naturalist's Journal*; though I confess I should like to have added many more.

Mr. Bright not long ago specially recommended the less known American poets, but he probably assumed that every one would have read Shakes-

peare, Milton (*Paradise Lost, Lycidas, Comus* and minor poems), Chaucer, Dante, Spencer, Dryden, Scott, Wordsworth, Pope, Byron, and others, before embarking on more doubtful adventures.

Among other books most frequently recommended are Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Arabian Nights*, *Don Quixote*, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, White's *Natural History of Selborne*, Burke's Select Works (Payne), the Essays of Bacon, Addison, Hume, Montaigne, Macaulay, and Emerson, Carlyle's *Past and Present*, Smiles' *Self-Help*, and Goethe's *Faust* and *Autobiography*.

Nor can one go wrong in recommending Berkeley's *Human Knowledge*, Descartes' *Discours sur la Méthode*, Locke's *Conduct of the Understanding*, Lewes' *History of Philosophy;* while, in order to keep within the number one hundred, I can only mention Moliére and Sheridan among dramatists. Macaulay considered Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne* the best novel in any language, but my number is so nearly complete that I must content myself with English: and will suggest Thackeray (*Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*), Dickens (*Pickwick* and *David Copperfield*), G. Eliot (*Adam Bede* or *The Mill on the Floss*), Kingsley (*Westward Ho!*), Lytton (*Last Days of Pompeii*), and last, not least, those of Scott, which indeed constitute a library in themselves, but which

I must ask, in return for my trouble, to be allowed, as a special favor, to count as one.

To any lover of books the very mention of these names brings back a crowd of delicious memories, grateful recollections of peaceful home hours, after the labors and anxieties of the day. How thankful we ought to be for these inestimable blessings, for this numberless host of friends who never weary, betray, or forsake us!

LIST OF 100 BOOKS.

Works by Living Authors are omitted.

The Bible
The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius
Epictetus
Aristotle's Ethics
Analects of Confucius
St. Hilaire's "Le Bouddha et sa religion"
Wake's Apostolic Fathers
Thos. à Kempis' Imitation of Christ
Confessions of St. Augustine (Dr. Pusey)
The Koran (portions of)
Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus
Comte's Catechism of Positive Philosophy
Pascal's Pensées
Butler's Analogy of Religion
Taylor's Holy Living and Dying
Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress
Keble's Christian Year

Plato's Dialogues; at any rate, the Apology, Crito, and Phædo

Xenophon's Memorabilia
Aristotle's Politics
Demosthenes' De Coronâ
Cicero's De Officiis, De Amicitiâ, and De Senectute
Plutarch's Lives
Berkeley's Human Knowledge
Descartes' Discours sur la Méthode
Locke's On the Conduct of the Understanding

Homer
Hesiod
Virgil
Maha Bharata } Epitomized in Talboys Wheeler's
Ramayana } History of India, vols. i. and ii.
The Shahnameh
The Nibelungenlied
Malory's Morte d'Arthur

The Sheking
Kalidasa's Sakuntala or The Lost Ring
Æschylus' Prometheus
Trilogy of Orestes
Sophocles' Œdipus
Euripides' Medea
Aristophanes' The Knights and Clouds
Horace

Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (perhaps in Morris' edition; or, if expurgated, in C. Clarke's, or Mrs. Haweis')
Shakespeare
Milton's Paradise Lost, Lycidas, Comus, and the shorter poems
Dante's Divina Commedia
Spenser's Fairie Queen

Dryden's Poems
Scott's Poems
Wordsworth (Mr. Arnold's selection)
Pope's Essay on Criticism
Essay on Man
Rape of the Lock
Burns
Byron's Childe Harold
Gray

Herodotus
Xenophon's Anabasis and Memorabilia
Thucydides
Tacitus' Germania
Livy
Gibbon's Decline and Fall
Hume's History of England
Grote's History of Greece
Carlyle's French Revolution
Green's Short History of England
Lewes' History of Philosophy

Arabian Nights
Swift's Gulliver's Travels
Defoe's Robinson Crusoe
Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield
Cervantes' Don Quixote
Boswell's Life of Johnson
Molière
Schiller's William Tell
Sheridan's The Critic, School for Scandal, and The Rivals
Carlyle's Past and Present

Bacon's Novum Organum
Smith's Wealth of Nations (part of)

Mill's Political Economy
Cook's Voyages
Humboldt's Travels
White's Natural History of Selborne
Darwin's Origin of Species
Naturalist's Voyage
Mill's Logic

Bacon's Essays
Montaigne's Essays
Hume's Essays
Macaulay's Essays
Addison's Essays
Emerson's Essays
Burke's Select Works
Smiles' Self-Help

Voltaire's Zadig and Micromegas
Goethe's Faust, and Autobiography
Thackeray's Vanity Fair
Pendennis
Dickens' Pickwick
David Copperfield
Lytton's Last Days of Pompeii
George Eliot's Adam Bede
Kingsley's Westward Ho!
Scott's Novels

A SONG OF BOOKS.

A SONG OF BOOKS.

"Oh for a booke and a shadie nooke,
Eyther in doore or out;
With the grene leaves whispering overhead
Or the streete cryes all about.
Where I maie reade all at my ease,
Both of the newe and old;
For a jollie goode booke whereon to looke,
Is better to me than golde."

OLD ENGLISH SONG.

OF all the privileges we enjoy in this nineteenth century there is none, perhaps, for which we ought to be more thankful than for the easier access to books.

The debt we owe to books was well expressed by Richard de Bury, Bishop of Durham, author of *Philobiblon*, written as long ago as 1344, published in 1473, and the earliest English treatise on the delights of literature:—"These," he says, "are the masters who instruct us without rods and ferules, without hard words and anger, without clothes or money. If you approach them, they are not asleep; if investigating you interrogate them, they

conceal nothing; if you mistake them, they never grumble; if you are ignorant, they cannot laugh at you. The library, therefore, of wisdom is more precious than all riches, and nothing that can be wished for is worthy to be compared with it. Whosoever therefore acknowledges himself to be a zealous follower of truth, of happiness, of wisdom, of science, or even of the faith, must of necessity make himself a lover of books." But if the debt were great then, how much more now.

This feeling that books are real friends is constantly present to all who love reading. "I have friends," said Petrarch, "whose society is extremely agreeable to me; they are of all ages, and of every country. They have distinguished themselves both in the cabinet and in the field, and obtained high honors for their knowledge of the sciences. It is easy to gain access to them, for they are always at my service, and I admit them to my company, and dismiss them from it, whenever I please. They are never troublesome, but immediately answer every question I ask them. Some relate to me the events of past ages, while others reveal to me the secrets of Nature. Some teach me how to live, and others how to die. Some, by their vivacity, drive away my cares and exhilarate my spirits; while others give fortitude to my mind, and teach me the important lesson how to restrain my desires, and to depend wholly on myself. They open to me, in short, the various avenues of all the arts and sciences, and upon their information I

may safely rely in all emergencies. In return for all their services, they only ask me to accommodate them with a convenient chamber in some corner of my humble habitation, where they may repose in peace; for these friends are more delighted by the tranquillity of retirement than with the tumults of society."

"He that loveth a book," says Isaac Barrow, "will never want a faithful friend, a wholesome counsellor, a cheerful companion, an effectual comforter. By study, by reading, by thinking, one may innocently divert and pleasantly entertain himself, as in all weathers, so in all fortunes."

Southey took a rather more melancholy view:

> "My days among the dead are pass'd,
> Around me I behold,
> Where'er these casual eyes are cast,
> The mighty minds of old.
> My never-failing friends are they,
> With whom I converse day by day."

Imagine, in the words of Aikin, "that we had it in our power to call up the shades of the greatest and wisest men that ever existed, and oblige them to converse with us on the most interesting topics —what an inestimable privilege should we think it! —how superior to all common enjoyments! But in a well-furnished library we, in fact, possess this power. We can question Xenophon and Cæsar on their campaigns, make Demosthenes and Cicero plead before us, join in the audiences of Socrates

and Plato, and receive demonstrations from Euclid and Newton. In books we have the choicest thoughts of the ablest men in their best dress."

"Books," says Jeremy Collier, "are a guide in youth and an entertainment for age. They support us under solitude, and keep us from being a burthen to ourselves. They help us to forget the crossness of men and things; compose our cares and our passions; and lay our disappointments asleep. When we are weary of the living, we may repair to the dead, who have nothing of peevishness, pride, or design in their conversation."

Sir John Herschel tells an amusing anecdote illustrating the pleasure derived from a book, not assuredly of the first order. In a certain village the blacksmith having got hold of Richardson's novel, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, used to sit on his anvil in the long summer evenings and read it aloud to a large and attentive audience. It is by no means a short book, but they fairly listened to it all. At length, when the happy turn of fortune arrived, which brings the hero and heroine together, and sets them living long and happily together according to the most approved rules, the congregation were so delighted as to raise a great shout, and procuring the church keys, actually set the parish bells a-ringing.

"The lover of reading," says Leigh Hunt, "will derive agreeable terror from *Sir Bertram* and the *Haunted Chamber;* will assent with delighted reason to every sentence in *Mrs. Bar-*

bauld's Essay; will feel himself wandering into solitudes with *Gray;* shake honest hands with *Sir Roger de Coverley;* be ready to embrace *Parson Adams*, and to chuck *Pounce* out of the window instead of the hat; will travel with *Marco Polo* and *Mungo Park;* stay at home with *Thomson;* retire with *Cowley;* be industrious with *Hutton;* sympathizing with *Gay* and *Mrs. Inchbald;* laughing with (and at) *Buncle;* melancholy, and forlorn, and self-restored with the shipwrecked mariner of *De Foe.*"

Carlyle has wisely said that a collection of books is a real university.

The importance of books has been appreciated in many quarters where we might least expect it. Among the hardy Norsemen runes were supposed to be endowed with miraculous power. There is an Arabic proverb, that "a wise man's day is worth a fool's life," and another—though it reflects perhaps rather the spirit of the Califs than of the Sultans,—that "the ink of science is more precious than the blood of the martyrs."

Confucius is said to have described himself as a man who "in his eager pursuit of knowledge forgot his food, who in the joy of its attainment forgot his sorrows, and did not even perceive that old age was coming on."

Yet, if this could be said by the Arabs and the Chinese, what language can be strong enough to express the gratitude we ought to feel for the advantages we enjoy! We do not appreciate, I

think, our good fortune in belonging to the nineteenth century. Sometimes, indeed, one may even be inclined to wish that one had not lived quite so soon, and to long for a glimpse of the books, even the school-books, of one hundred years hence. A hundred years ago not only were books extremely expensive and cumbrous, but many of the most delightful were still uncreated—such as the works of Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, and Trollope, not to mention living authors. How much more interesting science has become especially, if I were to mention only one name, through the genius of Darwin! Renan has characterized this as a most amusing century; I should rather have described it as most interesting: presenting us as it does with an endless vista of absorbing problems; with infinite opportunities; with more interest and less danger than surrounded our less fortunate ancestors.

Cicero described a room without books, as a body without a soul. But it is by no means necessary to be a philosopher to love reading.

Reading, indeed, is by no means necessarily study. Far from it. "I put," says Mr. Frederic Harrison, in his excellent article on the "Choice of Books," "I put the poetic and emotional side of literature as the most needed for daily use."

In the prologue to the *Legende of Goode Women*, Chaucer says:

"And as for me, though that I konne but lyte,
On bokes for to rede I me delyte,
And to him give I feyth and ful credence,
And in myn herte have him in reverence,
So hertely, that ther is game noon,
That fro my bokes maketh me to goon,
But yt be seldome on the holy day,
Save, certynly, when that the monthe of May
Is comen, and that I here the foules synge,
And that the floures gynnen for to sprynge,
Farwel my boke and my devocion."

But I doubt whether, if he had enjoyed our advantages, he could have been so certain of tearing himself away, even in the month of May.

Macaulay, who had all that wealth and fame, rank and talents could give, yet, we are told, derived his greatest happiness from books. Sir G. Trevelyan, in his charming biography, says that—"of the feelings which Macaulay entertained toward the great minds of bygone ages it is not for any one except himself to speak. He has told us how his debt to them was incalculable; how they guided him to truth; how they filled his mind with noble and graceful images; how they stood by him in all vicissitudes—comforters in sorrow, nurses in sickness, companions in solitude, the old friends who are never seen with new faces; who are the same in wealth and in poverty, in glory and in obscurity. Great as were the honors and possessions which Macaulay acquired by his pen, all who knew him were well aware that the titles and rewards which he gained by his own

works were as nothing in the balance compared with the pleasure he derived from the works of others."

There was no society in London so agreeable that Macaulay would have preferred it at breakfast or at dinner "to the company of Sterne or Fielding, Horace Walpole or Boswell." The love of reading which Gibbon declared he would not exchange for all the treasures of India was, in fact, with Macaulay "a main element of happipiness in one of the happiest lives that it has ever fallen to the lot of the biographer to record."

"History," says Fuller, "maketh a young man to be old without either wrinkles or gray hair, privileging him with the experience of age without either the infirmities or the inconveniences thereof."

So delightful indeed are books that we must be careful not to forget other duties for them; in cultivating the mind we must not neglect the body.

To the lover of literature or science, exercise often presents itself as an irksome duty, and many a one has felt like "the fair pupil of Ascham (Lady Jane Gray), who, while the horns were sounding and dogs in full cry, sat in the lonely oriel, with eyes riveted to that immortal page which tells how meekly and bravely (Socrates) the first martyr of intellectual liberty took the cup from his weeping jailer."

Still, as the late Lord Derby justly observed, those who do not find time for exercise will have to find time for illness.

Books, again, are now so cheap as to be within the reach of almost every one. This was not always so. It is quite a recent blessing. Mr. Ireland, to whose charming little *Book Lover's Enchiridion*, in common with every lover of reading, I am greatly indebted, tells us that when a boy he was so delighted with White's *Natural History of Selborne*, that in order to possess a copy of his own he actually copied out the whole work.

Mary Lamb gives a pathetic description of a studious boy lingering at a bookstall:

"I saw a boy with eager eye
Open a book upon a stall,
And read, as he'd devour it all;
Which, when the stall man did espy,
Soon to the boy I heard him call,
'You, sir, you never buy a book,
Therefore in one you shall not look.'
The boy passed slowly on, and with a sigh
He wished he never had been taught to read,
Then of the old churl's books he should have had no need."

Such snatches of literature have indeed, special and peculiar charm. This is, I believe, partly due to the very fact of their being brief. Many readers miss much of the pleasure of reading by forcing themselves to dwell too long continuously

on one subject. In a long railway journey, for instance, many persons take only a single book. The consequence is that, unless it is a story, after half an hour or an hour they are quite tired of it. Whereas, if they had two, or still better three books, on different subjects, and one of them of an amusing character, they would probably find that, by changing as soon as they felt at all weary, they would come back again and again to each with renewed zest, and hour after hour would pass pleasantly away. Every one, of course, must judge for himself, but such at least is my experience.

I quite agree, therefore, with Lord Iddesleigh as to the charm of desultory reading, but the wider the field the more important that we should benefit by the very best books in each class. Not that we need confine ourselves to them, but that we should commence with them, and they will certainly lead us on to others. There are of course some books which we must read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. But these are exceptions. As regards by far the larger number, it is probably better to read them quickly, dwelling only on the best and most important passages. In this way, no doubt, we shall lose much, but we gain more by ranging over a wider field. We may, in fact, I think, apply to reading Lord Brougham's wise dictum as regards education, and say that it is well to read everything of something, and something of everything. In this way only we can ascertain the bent of our own tastes, for it is a gen-

eral, though not of course an invariable, rule, that we profit little by books which we do not enjoy.

Every one, however, may suit himself. The variety is endless.

Not only does a library contain "infinite riches in a little room," but we may sit at home and yet be in all quarters of the earth. We may travel round the world with Captain Cook or Darwin, with Kingsley or Ruskin, who will show us much more perhaps than ever we should see for ourselves. The world itself has no limits for us; Humboldt and Herschel will carry us far away to the mysterious nebulæ, beyond the sun and even the stars: time has no more bounds than space; history stretches out behind us, and geology will carry us back for millions of years before the creation of man, even to the origin of the material Universe itself. Nor are we limited to one plane of thought. Aristotle and Plato will transport us into a sphere none the less delightful because we cannot appreciate it without some training.

Comfort and consolation, refreshment and happiness, may indeed be found in his library by any one "who shall bring the golden key that unlocks its silent door." A library is true fairyland, a very palace of delight, a haven of repose from the storms and troubles of the world. Rich and poor can enjoy it equally, for here, at least, wealth gives no advantage. We may make a library, if we do but rightly use it, a true paradise on earth, a gar-

[1] Marlowe. [2] Matthews.

den of Eden without its one drawback; for all is open to us, including, and especially, the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, for which we are told that our first mother sacrificed all the Pleasures of Paradise. Here we may read the most important histories, the most exciting volumes of travels and adventures, the most interesting stories, the most beautiful poems; we may meet the most eminent statesmen, poets, and philosophers, benefit by the ideas of the greatest thinkers, and enjoy the grandest creations of human genius.

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